

USG Support for Forest Management and Reduced Illegal Logging

The **reduction of illegal logging and conversion of primary forests** is a primary objective of U.S. Government (USG) assistance in the environment sector. The assistance program is delivered principally by USAID.

The **Environmental Governance Project** (EcoGov), implemented in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and local government units (LGU), has been working in 79 LGUs in Northern Luzon as well as the Visayas and Central and Western Mindanao to improve governance of forests and other natural resources through greater transparency, accountability and participation. Key strategies include:

- ✓ bringing open access areas under effective management regimes;
- ✓ strengthening community-based forest management, the Philippines' primary forest management policy;
- ✓ implementing co-management agreements among DENR, LGUs and community groups; and
- ✓ strengthening institutions and networks for monitoring and law enforcement.

EcoGov is assisting a number of **local governments in Aurora and Nueva Vizcaya**. For example, earlier this year, EcoGov provided paralegal and law enforcement training to DENR, local governments and community groups, including participants from the Aurora LGUs of Dingalan, Baler, Maria Aurora, and Casiguran, and Nueva Ecija LGUs of Muñoz, Talavera, and Cabanatuan.

USAID's **Environment Justice Project** supports legal assistance to indigenous and local communities participating in government-sponsored community-based natural resource management programs. Support includes helping local groups defend forest resources against illegal users, developing strategies to promote and defend community based property rights, conducting paralegal training, and strengthening community-based institutions and local leaders. USAID has assisted over 50 communities to date and targets 50 additional communities over the next 2 years.

This year USAID and our Department of Interior launched the **Partnership for Biodiversity Conservation**, a new initiative to work with DENR as well as the PNP and other agencies to help **strengthen enforcement** of environmental (including forestry) laws and regulations.

In 2002, the USG and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) signed two bilateral agreements under the **U.S. Tropical Forest Conservation Act**, which revised the terms of \$41.5 million in Philippine debt to the U.S. and diverted \$8.25 million in interest payments over 14 years to a local fund that will support forest conservation activities of local NGOs. The GRP, USG and NGO community are currently working together to establish the **Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation** which will manage the fund, which is expected to be operational in early 2005.

Through the **SUCCESS Alliance for Smallholder Cocoa Development**, USAID and local partners are assisting smallholders to improve quality and quantity of cocoa production through adoption of improved crop husbandry, propagation and integrated pest management, and linkages to the market for their produce in order to reduce pressure to clear natural forests for shifting "slash-and-burn" agriculture.

Community-Based Forestry: the Key to Success

At least 20 million Filipinos are upland dwellers, residing in the forest classified areas and highly dependent on the forest for subsistence and livelihood. Community-based forest management (CBFM) is the guiding forest management policy of the Philippines, and the USG has supported implementation of this policy since its inception. Under CBFM, local stakeholders such as the local governments and communities have the responsibility for managing forest lands; the right to harvest forest products; and incentives to develop agroforestry and tree plantations. Property rights are the key incentive for communities to protect the forest.

The Philippines has a large number of experienced and dedicated professionals working in CBFM, including in DENR and local governments. Under President Fidel Ramos, DENR carried out an ambitious program in CBFM, led by former DENR Secretary Victor I. Ramos. DENR's leadership under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has also been supportive of CBFM. An external evaluation of a USAID-funded community forestry program implemented with DENR identified many successes. For example, forests under community management showed increased protection from fires, illegal logging and clearing for agriculture. USAID's current program seeks to overcome current challenges and expand the CBFM approach more broadly in the Philippines.